

## **TRUSTEES AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS**

It is essential for trustees to be knowledgeable about the political process and to learn ways to affect decision making. It is equally important for trustees to understand the layers of the political process. In Virginia, these layers include town, county or city, and state officials who have certain powers through which libraries gain support. On the national level, Congress makes broad decisions that filter directly down to affect states and localities. Trustees need to cultivate frank, open relationships with all of these officials, working with them to produce the best possible climate for libraries.

### **Lobbying**

Lobbying is the process of expressing opinions to the decision makers and supporting those opinions. It provides an excellent opportunity for trustees to speak out with knowledge and experience, to present facts, figures, and evidence, and to help legislators understand libraries and what they mean to their constituents. Trustees should get to know their elected officials on the local, state, and national levels and to communicate with them about the issues affecting libraries.

Lobbying is the job of trustees. You represent the community and are advocates of the library. Trustees can make a difference because:

- You see the library from the user's viewpoint;
- You have a perspective on the full range of public services;
- You represent a broad base of consumers;
- You are volunteer participants in government; and
- You are voters.

Remember, you do not have to do it alone. Others in the community will be willing to support you if you provide them with the facts and let them know you need their help. In any lobbying effort, participants need to understand the legislative process and to proceed under a coordinated plan of action.

Although there are a variety of ways to lobby, there is no substitute for personal contact. Remember always to thank elected officials for listening to you and for helping you.

Keep up with proposed legislation on the local, state, and national levels that may have an impact on library service in your community. Support and participate in state and national Legislative Day activities sponsored by the Virginia Library Association. Be a true advocate for libraries!

## **The ABC's of Lobbying for Library Trustees**

<b>ANSWERS</b>	Be sure you have them. Anticipate questions and be prepared.
<b>BUILD</b>	coalition. Involve others who share your concerns: library users, Friends, business people, teachers, retirees.
<b>COMMUNICATE</b>	State your case clearly, concisely, consistently.
<b>DEVELOP</b>	a plan with a timetable for what you want to accomplish. Follow it.
<b>EXPERT</b>	Remember you're it.
<b>FOCUS</b>	on the facts. Prepare a simple fact sheet to give to legislators. Use as the basis for letters, testimonials.
<b>GOALS</b>	Know what you want and how you aim to make it happen.
<b>HELP</b>	Offer the library's services to those you're trying to impress.
<b>INVITE</b>	a legislator to lunch. Sponsor special legislative days or breakfasts to share your concerns.
<b>JOG</b>	their minds about libraries year-round. Send newsletters, articles of special interest. Don't wait for a crisis to make a contact.
<b>KEEP</b>	our cool. Avoid arguments. Keep talking and smiling.
<b>LOCAL</b>	Represent the local point of view. Tell how the proposal will affect the library and voters in your community.
<b>MEMBERS</b>	Don't take your members/supporters for granted. Keep them informed of what is happening and how they can help.
<b>NEEDS</b>	Know the library's needs and priorities. Work with the director.
<b>OPINION</b>	Speak up with your opinion. Make clear whom you represent.
<b>POLITICS</b>	Learn how politics are played in your area, who the key players are.
<b>QUICKLY</b>	Know the status of your proposal and be ready to respond quickly.
<b>REASONABLE</b>	Keep your request reasonable. Be prepared to compromise.



<b>SUPPORT</b>	legislators who support libraries. Give money. Campaign. Urge others to support them. Above all, <b>vote</b> for them.
<b>THANK</b>	your legislators in person and in writing. Let them know you appreciate them.
<b>USE</b>	the correct form of address, a small, but important detail. Check your library for correct names, titles, and addresses.
<b>VISIT</b>	your legislators. Attend meetings. Let them meet the face behind the voice or letter.
<b>WRITE</b>	letters, friendly, to the point, that let the legislator know where you stand. Avoid form letters.
<b>(E)XTRA</b>	attention to detail pays off. Your credibility depends on being well organized.
<b>YOU</b>	can make a difference. Let those in power know there are people out there who care about libraries.
<b>ZEALOUS</b>	Never give up! Be zealous in your efforts to keep libraries visible and their needs known.

Adapted from the brochure *Speaking Out For Libraries*, produced by the American Library Trustee Association.

**Do you know your local, state, and national elected officials?**

**Have you contacted your state or national legislators about  
library legislation or funding?**

**Do you discuss pending legislation at your board meetings?**